

21 Mar 2017

Submission to revised Flora Fauna Guarantee Act 2017

About me

I am a retired individual concerned about the impacts of climate change on our future generations. For the the past eight years I frequently volunteer at various tree planting friends of groups. Last years I attended planting at: Melton, Sunbury, Caroline Springs, Deer Park, St Albans, West Sunshine, Totenham, West Footscray, Hoppers Crossing, Williams Landing, Point Cook, Altona, Altona Meadows, North Altona, Newport, Williamstown and the Pinkerton Landcare Environment Group. I also volunteer at and participate in weed eradication activities.

Introduction

The Flora Fauna Guarantee Act supports the addendum of the recently legislated Victorian Climate Change Act 2017, as they share a common cause in preventing habitat destruction and at the same time the loss of stored carbon for abatement. We are all living on borrowed time if we fail to address the serious threat of climate change.

Therefore the Flora Fauna Guarantee Act should hold the merit of substance needed to deliver the protection that it can afford to achieve our sustainable environmental outcomes.

The recently released Federal 2016 State of the Environment report is an indictment of the growing threat of ecological collapses occurring on our watch. As earth's custodians we must care that all of life's biodiversity is what interconnects us as one finite entity.

We are on the precipice of the 6th next mass extinction, with human driven consequences. The scale of this depends on what we are prepared do to prevent this happening. Getting this right determines what kind of world we will be living in.

Species extinctions are occurring at record breaking levels along with ecosystems now in free fall. World wildlife populations have declined of 60% since the 1970's, further projected to decline to 67% by 2020. (1) The forecast global trend is extinctions of 16% by 2100. (2)

Even the process of declaring a species vulnerable, endangered or threatened should be now be adopted in the sense of "in the foreseeable likely future", given the time it takes to act.

Building and protecting our biodiversity will make it more resilient to an ever changing climate that is set to test many species becoming threatened and extinct. The guiding direction should acknowledge this challenging environment and require mandatory set action plans which adequately fund its program responses.

If the total cost is assessed at \$1bn and we only get a \$500m budget, we need to decide what

can be saved and at what cost for a maximum benefit. Limited funding dilutes their objectives, the prioritisation needs to be valued on a cost benefit consideration. Also a reserve budget amount needs to be set aside for any unforeseen interim developments.

How the FFG Act needs to help Impacts on our Fauna

Feral animals control needs better management as they are destroying vast areas of our native species populations. Cats, rabbits, deer and foxes form the majority of pests of concern. The FFG Act needs to do more to control feral animal populations by directing funding and investment and also mandating governments to act.

Habitat destruction weakens the whole biostasis within an ecosystem as each part supports its unseen interconnected counterparts. As 70% of animal biodiversity resides primarily in a forest environments. The FFG Act needs to include controls to, halt deforestation and make reforestation a priority to protect the habitat of forest dwelling species.

Worldwide bees populations have declined 38%. Butterflies populations are main pollinators of native grassland wildflowers, these have declined by 31%. The FFG Act needs to do more to restore the declining state of our pollinators and reverse these trajectories of decline.

How the FFG Act needs to help Impacts on our Flora

Weeds are likely to out compete the natural flora with continued shifting temperature zones and increased atmospheric carbon dioxide fertilisation. Weeds have a huge economic impact if left unchecked. (1) The FFG Act needs to mandate that strong action is taken with respect to weed control.

It is also hard to express what the Australian landscape will look like if 50% of gum trees are to be lost by 2100, as predicted in a hotter climate (see. Re Climate Council). The FFG Act needs to be able to incorporate adaptive management practices to deal with changing ecosystems as a result of climate change.

Fire and the FFG act

The FFG Act needs to put in place a framework that better regulates activities like fuel reduction burns whilst protecting it's biodiversity.

The coronial inquest into the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires recommended a mandatory 5% annual fire fuel load reduction burn off. This does not mean doing it at least cost or at the expense of sensitive fauna habitat, it needs to reduce fire risk in targeted potential hot spot gullies pockets during winter. One of the best natural fire inhibitor are lyrebirds which turnover ground debris from building up.

As an example of how the FFG Act has failed to protect biodiversity. I submit that the land cleared as a fire break to the Thompson Dam was ill conceived for the following reasons.

- 1/ As fires embers jump containment lines,
- 2/ It was more to do with logging access.
- 3/ The cleared land was left vacant to be invaded with an English Broom an unchecked weed now taking over the area.
- 4/ In the removal of the Mountain Ash - Eucalyptus raglans we lose a high carbon abater and this also stresses the nearby forest by drying out the adjacent micro climate.

Lightning increases by about 12% for every one degree celcius of climate change rise, as half of all fires are started by lightning we will all need to be better fire prepared in the future as the next degree rise will be advancing here by around 2040.

The FFG Act and Impacts on water issues

There could be more plastic by weight in the ocean than fish by 2050. (4) It is important we are acting to contain this at our end as climate change flooding incidents are said to increase waste volume being flushed out to sea by 15% by end of the century.

A reformed FFG Act needs to put in place a high standard of protection for Victoria's biodiversity, including taking strong action on listed threatening processes such as marine debris. An action statement needs to be urgently created to set out what actions need to be taken to tackle the threat posed to marine species by plastic pollution, and identified actions shall be binding on the government to implement. Removing the obligation on government to produce mandatory action statements is not acceptable.

Water decline is and will continue to lower the health and quality on already stressed ecosystems, a concern as becoming more arid may lead to desertification, that further drives the loss of irreplaceable vital top soils. Major dust storms in Australia remove 1.6 million tonnes of soil carbon each year. If agricultural soil health declines, it will be then forced us to compete more with nature to feed our growing population.

We need to take greater responsibility to raise the bar higher for a new level of protection if we are to preserve nature for future generations in a critically climate challenged world.

Summary Summation

I would like to endorse the key point resolutions proposed by Environment Justice Australia. At a minimum, a reformed FFG Act needs to incorporate these key points.

- **A fair go for threatened species** with no exemptions or special treatments for government departments or certain industries

- **Stronger stop and protect powers** so the Minister can intervene when important species or habitats are under threat
- **A nature cop on the beat** with strong enforcement, real penalties and proper monitoring
- **Clear targets and timelines** to direct investment and programs for threatened species protection and recovery
- **Community power to act**, including the ability to initiate legal action to protect threatened species

References

(1) Australian Government, Weeds in Australia web

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(2) World Wildlife Fund and the Zoological Society of London, Living Planet Index report

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(3) Mark C. Urban, Accelerating extinction risk from climate change

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(4) Ellen Mac Arthur Foundation Davos World Economic Forum Jan 2016

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